

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 001

INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

CINCPAC

AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

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AMEMBASSY WARSAW

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MPOL PFOR UR MY
SUBJ: SOVIET STRATEGY FOR SOUTHEAST ASIA

REF: MOSCOW 6800

SUMMARY: IN PURSUING ITS OBJECTIVES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

THE USSR WILL BE AS MUCH MANIPULATED AS MANIPULATING. THERE IS NO GENERAL EAGERNESS TO EMBRACE THE RUSSIANS, AND A GREATER RUSSIAN PRESENCE DOES NOT MEAN NECESSARILY INCREASED INFLUENCE. RUSSIAN DIPLOMATS ARE NOW BETTER QUALIFIED AND ARE TRYING HARD. THEY OPERATE HOWEVER UNDER SERIOUS HANDICAPS. END SUMMARY.

1. THE BASIC ERROR IN MOSCOW'S STRATEGY FOR SOUTHEAST ASIA AS OUTLINED IN REFTEL IS THE PRESUMPTION THAT THE SOVIETS WILL BE DEALING WITH NAIVE, POLITICALLY UNSOPHISTICATED PEOPLE, EASILY MANIPULATED AND DISPOSED TO BE INFLUENCED. AS THE AUSSIES WOULD SAY, NOT BLOODY LIKELY. SOVIET OBJECTIVES ARE WELL UNDERSTOOD, AND SOVIET EFFORTS TO REACH ITS GOALS WILL BE SKILLFULLY TURNED AND EXPLOITED BY MASTERS OF THE ARTFUL DODGE. IN TRYING TO SEDUCE SOUTHEAST ASIA, THE CHANCES ARE BETTER THAN EVEN THAT THE RUSSIANS WILL GET ROLLED.

2. IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE ALSO TO ASSUME A GENERALLY ENHANCED RECEPTIVITY TO AN EXPANSION OF MILITARY TIES WITH THE USSR AS A RESULT OF DEVELOPMENT IN INDOCHINA. IT IS WIDELY AGREED THAT THERE IS NO CONVENTIONAL MILITARY THREAT FROM THE GREAT POWERS AND THEREFORE NO NEED FOR CONVENTIONAL ALLIANCES WITH ANY OF THEM TO MEET SUCH A CONTINGENCY. THE THREAT IS INSURGENCY AND SUBVERSION, AND IN THE MALAYSIAN SITUATION, NEITHER A RUSSIAN NOR AN AMERICAN CRUISER IN PENANG WILL MAKE ANY IMPRESSION ON THE CT'S ON THE THAI BORDER. THE PRC-USSR RIVALRY BROUGHT TO SOUTHEAST ASIA WOULD MEAN NEW TROUBLES FOR THE AREA, AND THERE IS A GENERAL PREFERENCE FOR NO BIG POWER MILITARY PRESENCE, AND NO DISPOSITION WHATEVER TO EMBRACE THE RUSSIANS.

3. SOVIET DESIRE TO GAIN INFLUENCE AND SEA WILLINGNESS TO EXPLOIT THESE EFFORTS MAY PRODUCE A GREATER RUSSIAN PRESENCE
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AS ADVISORS AND TECHNICIANS COME TO ASSIST IN PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS. A COMMON INTEREST IN INCREASING TRADE TIES WILL ALSO MEAN MORE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE SOVIET TRADING COMPANIES. THIS INCREASED PRESENCE DOES NOT MEAN NECESSARILY INCREASED INFLUENCE. THERE WERE THOUSANDS OF MILITARY AND CIVILIAN RUSSIAN ADVISORS AND TECHNICIANS IN INDONESIA FROM 1955 TO 1965. BRIEFERS IN THOSE DAYS USED TO SAY THAT THERE WERE MORE RUSSIANS IN INDONESIA THAN THE REST OF THE

DEVELOPING WORLD COMBINED. THE NET EFFECT HOWEVER WAS NEGATIVE, AND THOUSANDS OF INDONESIAN COMMUNISTS RODE TO THEIR DEATHS IN RUSSIAN AND CZECH TRUCKS IN THE AFTERMATH OF GESTAPU.

4. THE RUSSIANS ARE TRYING HARDER. IT WAS IN JAKARTA IN 1954 WHEN THE SOVIET EMBASSY OPENED, AND THE CURRENT CROP OF RUSSIAN DIPLOMATS OBSERVED HERE IS CLEARLY SUPERIOR. THEIR YOUNG OFFICERS SPEAK GOOD ENGLISH AND EXCELLENT INDONESIAN. THEY ARE FRESH-FACED AND EAGER, AND IN DRESS AND HAIRCUT RESEMBLE YOUNG AMERICAN FSO'S OF TWENTY YEARS AGO. THEY OPERATE UNDER SERIOUS HANDICAPS, HOWEVER.

-- THE BLACK HAT, BLACK HORSE, FIVE-O'CLOCK SHADOW, BAD-GUY IMAGE PERSISTS. THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR HAS COMPLAINED TO ME (WITH SOME JUSTICE) THAT THE LOCAL

PRESS NEVER CARRIES A NEWS OR FEATURE STORY THAT PORTRAYS

SOVIET SOCIETY IN A FAVORABLE LIGHT. THEY SEEM HOWEVER INSENSITIVE TO ACTIONS WHICH TEND TO CONFIRM THIS IMAGE. ACCORDING TO A MALAYSIAN MILITARY SOURCE, TWELVE RUSSIAN SERVICE ATTACHES RECENTLY ASSIGNED TO ASEAN COUNTRIES INCLUDING MALAYSIA HAD BEEN SENT HOME FROM PREVIOUS ASSIGNMENTS BECAUSE OF IMPERMISSIBLE ACTIVITIES.

-- THEY ARE ALL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. THE ABSENCE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR DEPRIVES THE RUSSIANS OF AN IMPORTANT CHANNEL OF CONTACT AND INFLUENCE.

-- THE RELATIVIST CULTURES OF SOUTHEAST ASIA STAND IN PARTICULARLY SHARP CONTRAST TO THE RIGIDITIES, IDEOLOGICAL ABSOLUTES, AND SOCIAL SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE SOVIET
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SYSTEM. BELOW THE LEVEL OF SOCIAL COURTESY OR TECHNICAL DISCUSSION IT IS DIFFICULT TO FIND A COMMON MEETING GROUND, AND THE RUSSIAN MUST OFTEN FIND HIMSELF WITH NOTHING TO SAY IN HIS GOOD ENGLISH AND EXCELLENT INDONESIAN THAT DOES NOT EITHER OFFEND OR MYSTIFY. KUZNETSOV, FORMER SOVIET AMBASSADOR HERE, AND PRESUMABLY THE SAME MAN MENTIONED IN PARA 7 OF REFTTEL, BECAME ADDICTED TO GOLF IN INDONESIA AND PLAYED VIRTUALLY EVERY DAY IN KUALA LUMPUR. GOLF IS POPULAR HERE AND HIS HOBBY BROUGHT HIM IN CONTACT WITH THE IMPORTANT AND THE POWERFUL. KUSNETZOV WAS JOVIAL AND POPULAR, BUT THE WAY HE PLAYED GOLF, -- HIS SINGLE-MINDED AGGRESSIVENESS, HIS DISDAIN OF GOLF ETIQUETTE, AND HIS LACK OF CONSIDERATION FOR FOURSOMES IN FRONT OF AND BEHIND HIM, WAS SEEN AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE SOVIET NATIONAL CHARACTER. HE HAD LEARNED THE LANGUAGE, BUT SAID THE WRONG THING.

-- NO MATTER HOW GOOD YOUR SALESMEN, THE PRODUCT MUST APPEAL.
THE SOVIET PRODUCT ISN'T VERY ATTRACTIVE, AND GREATER
EXPOSURE TENDS TO CONFIRM THAT JUDGMENT. THE RUSSIAN AMBASSADOR
COMPLAINS TO ME THAT HE CAN'T GET THE MALAYSIANS TO ACCEPT HIS
SCHOLARSHIPS. JUDGING BY THE EFFECT ON INDONESIANS WHO STUDIED IN
THE USSR IN THE 1955-65 PERIOD, WE SHOULD BE TRYING TO FIND SOME
COVERT WAY TO HELP HIM.

5. IN MALAYSIA IT IS HIGHLY DOUBTFUL THAT MOSCOW CAN
EXPLOIT ANTI-CHINESE SENTIMENT TO ITS BENEFIT, OR THAT THE
RACIAL SITUATION WOULD MAKE THE MALAYS RECEPTIVE TO AN
INCREASED SOVIET PRESENCE. IN THE LARGER GENERAL CONTEXT,
SOVIET-MALAYSIAN RELATIONS WILL EXPAND, BUT NOT IN A WAY
THAT WILL DAMAGE U.S. INTERESTS. THE RUSSIANS, IF THEY READ
IMPERIALIST POETS, MIGHT RECALL KIPLING'S LINES (SLIGHTLY
REVISED): "AT THE END OF THE FIGHT IS A TOMBSTONE WHITE/
WITH THE NAME OF THE LATE DECEASED;/ AND THE EPITAPH DREAR,
A FOOL LIES HERE/ WHO TRIED TO DIDDLE THE EAST."
UNDERHILL

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